



"When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."  
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**25-May-07**

## *Pentecost and Memorial Day*

Every now and again, the Feast of [Pentecost](#) and Memorial Day fall back-to-back on the calendar, as they do this year. At first blush, they seem to have little in common: one is religious, the other secular; one focuses on the harvest of firstfruits, the other on the patriotic sacrifices of loved ones; one has an agrarian background, the other has its roots in war; and so forth. They seem to be as far removed from each other as ancient history and current events, as distant as Jerusalem from Washington.

Yet, we should not be too hasty in concluding that they do not share any common features. Immediately, we can see that they occur in the same season of the year, as spring is ending and summer looms. In this way, they both mark time, an end and a beginning.

Memorial Day does this in a couple of ways. For most, and especially for children, this holiday, situated as it is at the end of May, represents the end of the school year and the beginning of the more carefree summer months. If the administrators had an ounce of sense, most schools would not run their academic year beyond Memorial Day, since 99 percent of the students have already mentally finished their studies for the year. Requiring them to attend class into the heat of June serves only to fulfill meaningless mandated days-of-instruction regulations. Of course, it follows that this holiday ushers in the months of summer vacation until Labor Day in early September.

A more serious set of ends and beginnings in Memorial Day is one that those who have lost loved ones in the nation's wars realize all too well. For these, Memorial Day closes one year and begins another without the soldier, sailor, airman, marine, or guardsman

## CGG Weekly: Pentecost and Memorial Day (25-May-07)

or - woman who gave his or her life in the defense of American freedom. This day is for them not so much a holiday as it is a solemn day of remembrance and [pride](#) in the patriotism of their fallen service member. In many, it renews a commitment to the national values that so many have died to protect.

For its part, Pentecost concludes the seven-week count from the [Days of Unleavened Bread](#), specifically commanded by [God](#) and unlike the determination of any other holy day. Such an oddity is a biblical tip-off that underlying spiritual meaning awaits our further study and consideration. That the count begins in the atmosphere of the Feast of Unleavened Bread - when thoughts of overcoming [sin](#) and putting on righteousness are thick in the air - traverses a time of verdure and growth, and finishes in a harvest, a reaping or gathering of ripe produce, should clue us in to at least one of the lessons God wishes us to learn from this annual exercise.

It marks a beginning too. Acts 2 tells us that the Christian church began on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after [Jesus Christ](#) was resurrected from the dead as a type of the [Wavesheaf offering](#), as the First of the firstfruits ([Romans 8:29](#); [1 Corinthians 15:23](#); [Revelation 1:5](#)). On this day, God sent His [Holy Spirit](#) to dwell in those few who had been converted during Christ's ministry, providing them with the understanding, power, and skills to proclaim [the gospel](#) of the [Kingdom of God](#) to [the world](#). From then until now, the church of God has fulfilled this commission to a greater or lesser extent, the gates of the grave not prevailing against it ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

Because Pentecost focuses so much on the church and its work, it is not too much of a stretch to consider it a kind of day of remembrance of those who have gone before us spiritually. From that first Christian Day of Pentecost to our own time, thousands of men and women have given themselves in sacrifice - both in dying and in living - to transmit the true gospel to us. Many true Christians in the first century, and certainly almost all the apostles, suffered martyrdom for their convictions about God and His way of life. Some of them suffered cruelly in the "pleasure gardens" of Nero and in the "games" in the Coliseum, but many more died alone and unheralded at the hands of rioters, wicked judges, and tyrannical rulers.

The sacrifices did not end there. In many times and places, the [true church](#) and its practices have been outlawed under penalty of fines, imprisonment, and death. Under such injustice, keeping the [Sabbath](#) was risking one's life - and the lives of one's family members. Whether it was being baptized by immersion or celebrating [Passover](#) or even reading Scripture in one's native tongue, practicing God's way of life was for such people a matter of life and death. Yet, down through the centuries, many gladly took this risk upon themselves, and what is more, some had the courage to proclaim it beyond

CGG Weekly: Pentecost and Memorial Day (25-May-07)

their families to the public. Most of these paid the highest price for their boldness, but the [truth](#) of God never ceased to be handed down from one generation to the next.

What the author of Hebrews says about the Old Testament faithful in [Hebrews 11:35-40](#) can be applied to many true Christians over the last nearly two thousand years:

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through [faith](#), did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

The Day of Pentecost pictures the spiritual harvest of firstfruits, among whom will be the Christian faithful down through the centuries. They still wait in their graves for their resurrection with us at the [return of Christ](#), and for the fulfillment of God's promise of [eternal life](#) and their reward in the Kingdom of God ([I Corinthians 15:51-52](#); [I Thessalonians 4:13-17](#)). Perhaps we can take a few moments this weekend to consider their sacrifices and thank God that He has called such heroes of faith into His Family.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

---

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Why Count Fifty Days?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh explores the significance of the number fifty, counting fifty, and the myriad applications of the number fifty throughout the Bible, such as in the measurements of the Tabernacle and Millennial Temple, as well as the 50 year Jubilee, a time of liberation and forgiveness of debts. Metaphorically, it represents counting the cost, evaluating our spiritual progress and priorities. In Psalm 90, Moses reckons the average lifespan to be 70 years. Subtracting the 20 years of youth, we have a remaining 50 years—at a time to thoughtfully measure our days, redeeming and prioritizing our time properly in order to gain a godly heart of wisdom.

## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [The Pentecost Witness](#)

by David C. Grabbe

Pentecost is known for its stupendous signs, particularly the display of power in Acts 2. David Grabbe shows that Pentecost teaches us of another, more personal witness: our own display of Christ's way of life in us.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---